

Correspondence

The Senate and Ancient History

TO THE EDITOR OF THE NATION:

SIR: Why flay Mr. Ford for his acknowledged ignorance of history, as many of your esteemed contemporaries are doing? Was it not so celebrated a statesman as Sir Robert Walpole who remarked that "history could not be true"? On this ground, several New York newspapers have taken occasion to point gleefully to Mr. Ford's unfitness to fill the office of United States Senator. However, I feel sure that Mr. Ford would not lack for company in that august body. There is no member of either House who, judging from his writings and speeches, appears to have sufficient knowledge of the laws of history to be able to apply them to the conditions by which we are confronted today. Yet that is all that makes the study of history valuable. And when I say history I mean not the history of the United States, nor the history of England, nor the history of France only, but the history of Europe and her colonies from the earliest times. One must know his Thucydides and his Polybius, as well as his Macaulay and his MacMaster. In fact the former are the more important, because we see in them laid bare, divested of all disguise, the forces that are at work in our own time. Listen to this from Thucydides: "The real cause I consider to be the one which was formerly most kept out of sight. The growth of the power of Athens, and the alarm which this inspired in Lacedæmon, made war inevitable." Or this: "In a single battle the Peloponnesians and their allies may be able to defy all Hellas, but they are incapacitated from carrying on a war with a power different in character from their own, by want of the single council-chamber requisite to prompt and vigorous action, and the substitution of a diet composed of various races, in which each state possesses an equal vote, and each presses its own ends, a condition of things which generally results in no action at all." This is the brand of historical knowledge that is of value to the man in public life, not a few isolated and unrelated facts of modern history.

North White Plains, N. Y., July 26

J. L. ELDRIDGE

The Negro Problem

TO THE EDITOR OF THE NATION:

SIR: A public service of unusual value was performed by *The Nation* in printing Mr. Seligmann's article entitled "Protecting Southern Womanhood" in its issue of June 14. Coupled with your editorial on the same general subject, "The Negro at Bay," it represents with unusual clearness and frankness a situation which this country must deal with some day, and which delay can only render more difficult. Whether one is interested in the Negro or not, interest in the country demands that the thinking people of the nation turn their attention to the most serious domestic problem now confronting them. I say "most serious" with a full realization of the meaning of the words. I am old-fashioned enough to believe that moral questions transcend in importance questions of economics or politics, and that anything which blunts the moral sensibilities of a people, and permits them to regard any group of human beings as outside the Ten Commandments or the Golden Rule, lays the axe at the foot of the tree of national life.

Washington, July 23

S. M. KENDRICK

Wanted, a More Excellent Way

TO THE EDITOR OF THE NATION:

SIR: Because I feel that *The Nation* champions the Negro's cause from a high moral, and not from a sentimental or political viewpoint, because I believe its ideals of truth and justice

are higher than those of any other journal printed in America, I am deeply interested in knowing what reasonable course it would advocate for the American Negro to adopt in helping to destroy the national pastime of lynching. You term Mr. DuBois's manly and courageous editorial in the *May Crisis* "dangerous and mistaken," and again, in your latest issue, you speak of "the mistaken teachings of some [Negro] leaders." They may be wrong, but what better way would you suggest?

I am a stranger in your midst—indeed, in the world—a poor follower of the truth. I have lived in the South, in the West, and in the East, not without remarking that Negroes are surrounded everywhere by mad dogs in human form. When a mad dog breaks loose, we call a policeman, and if one is not in sight, we kill the dog if we can. To me a lynching-mob bears a great resemblance to a pack of mad mongrels; but I may be wrong. Being black, I may see the hideous thing only through the eyes of prejudice, and not so clearly as you do from your pedestal of pure pity.

But what would you advise Negroes to do when the Federal or State Government withholds from them its protection, as it invariably does? Should they stand by with folded arms and see a member of their race tortured and burned? Should a Negro let himself be taken and tormented without show of resistance? Should Negroes remain supinely inactive while the womanhood of their race is outraged (and, incidentally, that of their tormentors cheapened)? In short, should not a Negro defend himself when attacked by the chivalrous Caucasian?

Have the blacks no soul of honor, no sense of racial pride? The fire of race hatred has burnt into our vitals. For America this is the greatest aftermath of the war. It is more than Mexico and Haiti, Shantung and Fiume, the Treaty and the League; yet all the little politicians, from the President down, ignore it.

You may have noticed that *The New York World*, the organ of political democracy, applauds the Negro spirit of resistance that you deplore. But you may know of a saner, a more excellent way of practical righteousness in the present circumstances. If you will only set it forth, perhaps many discerning Negro leaders will listen to you.

New York, July 24

CLAUDE MCKAY

["Thou shalt not kill" remains the only sound precept for races, nations, and individuals. It is the meek alone who shall inherit the earth. The Negro has, of course, the right to defend his home.—EDITOR of *The Nation*.]

An Ante-Bellum Voice on the Negro

TO THE EDITOR OF THE NATION:

SIR: In your recent wails over the race riots, you seek to throw the blame on the whites, especially on editors who "encourage lawlessness." They are far less guilty than you, for they at least stand up for white civilization against the forces of savagery and brutishness represented by the Negro, while you would fill his head with a lot of incendiary rubbish about his rights and his place in life. If you would come to Washington and be robbed and insulted and elbowed for a while by this malodorous third of the population, who seem to think that they are better than their betters, you might be cured of your ante-bellum sentimentalism about your "poor downtrodden black brother." The only thing to be done with the Negro is to keep him in the subordinate place for which Nature has adapted him, and this can be done if leaders like you will face the facts.

Washington, August 1

B.

Emigrés New and Old

TO THE EDITOR OF THE NATION:

SIR: How beautifully history repeats herself! Just as the French *émigrés*, fleeing from the Revolution, tried to induce the

German princes to unite and put down the enemies of the Old Order of Things, so now the representatives of the Russian bureaucracy, fleeing from the exaggerated spectre of Bolshevism, are engaging even the democracies of the world to unite and put down these new advocates of reform; and we have the spectacle of the United States sending its "subjects"—so the papers call the men who used to boast of being the equals of kings—to fight the Reds in Russia and Siberia. Does not the speech made by General, the Marquis de Custine, at Mayence, February 24, 1792, have a peculiarly familiar sound? Speaking before the German Society of Friends of Liberty and Equality, he said: "All nations form but a single family, bound together by the eternal principles of reason and virtue. Doubtless the French people has been driven to the sad necessity of making war, but we are making this war only that we may make no more in the future—in order to punish the injustices that have been inflicted upon us and to make known the rights of man to peoples that are born to be free. Deceived by the *émigrés*, the German princes thought that the conquest of France would be only child's play. The unanimity of twenty-five millions of men was not enough to undeceive those wretches; but the armies of France have now given the force of law to the decisions of their nation, and our enemies, trembling before our victorious arms, have abandoned the soil of liberty. They have drawn back, and they will never dare to attack us in this fortress. If they should, we should give them new evidence of the superiority of free men over slaves. May shame eternal dwell with those who prefer the clank of their chains to the sweet voice of liberty!"

Now, just as at that epoch, the glorious sunrise has been quickly obscured by new clouds rising from the same old quarter; and the bright hopes of men are vanishing in the prospect of another century of storm; for we are assured that this Devil War, "so happily concluded," has put back civilization a hundred years.

Ogunquit, Maine, July 18

NATHAN HASKELL DOLE

Guaranteeing the British Empire

TO THE EDITOR OF THE NATION:

SIR: By the 10th Article of the League of Nations, the United States of America would be pledged to "preserve as against external aggression the territorial integrity and existing political independence of all members of the League." By this article America would be compelled to guarantee, with her fleets and armies, for an indeterminate period, "the territorial integrity" of the British Empire.

America would, of course, incur many other obligations under the 10th Article, such as guaranteeing Korea and the Shantung Peninsula to Japan; but the obligation to "preserve" the British Empire would be the most crushing and burdensome. Before the war, Britain held, by force of arms, about one-fourth of the habitable area of the world, and governed almost exactly one-fourth of the world's population. As the spoils of war, the British Empire has just acquired from Germany about one million square miles of new colonies, which England will govern under a "mandatory," a visionary instrument, described by a writer in *The Fortnightly Review* as a "diplomatic fiction."

Besides these actual accessions of territory, England will acquire extensive and valuable spheres of influence, notably in Mesopotamia. Taken altogether, I have seen it stated that England will now control, by her fortifications, naval stations, fleets, and armies, by actual force and by intrigue, almost one-third of the entire world, with its inhabitants. No such empire has ever been known in history. Babylon and Rome fade into insignificance. And our country, the United States of America, is to guarantee the existence of this monstrous, this inconceivable empire, perhaps forever. Free and democratic America is to assist imperialistic Britain to hold one-third of the entire human race in subjection, by force of arms. I ask any

American citizen, is this the way to make the world safe for democracy?

New Haven, July 24

VERITAS

A Typical Case of War Department Oppression

TO THE EDITOR OF THE NATION:

SIR: Early in 1918 I had the unhappiness of attending for the first time in my life a court martial, held in Boston. I saw there the glaringly inevitable difference between the ordinary jury trial and the military court. Whereas no man who cherishes prejudice against the accused can sit on a jury, the court martial is necessarily composed of officer-judges instinctively possessed with the prejudices of their caste or profession, to whose minds any offense against military regulations, and especially the offense of pacifism, takes on an egregious importance. The prisoner before this court was Philip Grosser, a conscientious objector. The fact that he was born a Russian Jew and avowed himself a socialist probably created extra prejudice against him. No one who witnessed the trial can have been surprised at any scandal in the conduct of army courts. Already before the trial, and while the War Department had not formulated its policy toward the C. O.'s, the prisoner had been sent to a fort in Boston Harbor and subjected to torture in order to break his will. The court airily assumed that he was an ordinary soldier deliberately guilty of disobeying military commands, ignored his status as a prisoner in a special class awaiting a general decision by the Government to cover his case, and sentenced him to thirty years of imprisonment. The court was composed mostly of young Americans, and the young man whom they thus doomed to ruin gave the impression of unusual ability and bore an excellent character.

When at last the Administration formulated rules for the treatment of the C. O.'s, Grosser, with other men who had been variously abused in the interim (for example, a fine young Irishman of my neighborhood was driven to the verge of insanity), was transferred to Fort Leavenworth. Something of the cruelties perpetrated there, in that utter disrespect of the human spirit which is the essence of the criminality of the war system, has already become known. Let no one complacently believe that the cruelties have been stopped. As before, Grosser, while willing enough to work as a helper, for instance in the dining-room, quite refused to accept the status of a soldier. I am told that he made friends in the prison and that the chaplain reported him as "one of the finest fellows there."

For many weeks, however, his Boston friends have heard nothing directly from him—a fact which, coupled with what we knew about the Fort Leavenworth punishments, caused increasing anxiety. It appeared finally, for reasons which no inquiries so far have discovered, that he has been sent to the Alcatraz military prison in California, the very name of which arouses suggestions of horror. We learn that he has passed through a penal period of fourteen days in "the hole" or dungeon, a place of darkness and damp, of rats and filth. Kind people would gladly visit him, but permission is "refused." Word comes that he is recovering sufficiently to be scheduled for another fortnight in the dungeon, beginning soon. We used to be shocked at the doings of the German war-machine; it looks as if all war-machines were much alike. We cry out at Bulgarian cruelty, largely, I fear, because Bulgarians fought on the other side in the great war. It is doubtful whether Americans, on their cruel side, are very different from the Balkan people.

Is it not possible that letters and telegrams to Washington, urging that officials cannot wish to be responsible for any more cases of insanity or death, may penetrate the folds of their red-tape and touch their inconsiderate hearts? I believe this case merits wide publicity, not merely for Mr. Grosser's sake, who has never wished exceptional favors, but for the sake of scores of other young men still imprisoned.

Southwest Harbor, Me., July 31

CHARLES F. DOLE

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